

Spencer Coggs



State Senator

Senate Bill 523

Senate Committee on Labor, Elections, and Urban Affairs

March 3, 2010

Members,

Thank you for this hearing on Senate Bill (SB) 523. The bill limits the use of any funds by state agencies to deter workers efforts to organize for collective bargaining rights under the State Employment Labor Relations Act, or SELRA.

The technical aspects of the bill are actually quite simple – no state agency, which includes the University of Wisconsin System, would be able to use any funding source to deter such as union organizing.

For example, the University of Wisconsin System recently requested bids from private contractors to educate and train system leadership about the process of collective bargaining. This bill would **not** prevent the UW System from contracting for those services. However, the private contractor could not, in any way, shape or form, impede the worker's rights to collectively bargain.

Simply put, state law under SELRA already directs the state not to interfere in an individual employee's choice to join or be represented by a labor union. This bill prohibits an agency from deterring the union organizing process.

Thank you for your support of SB 523.

Good afternoon. My name is Bryan Kennedy, and in addition to being an adjunct professor at UW-Milwaukee, I am the president of AFT-Wisconsin, a labor union representing 17,000 professional public employees in Wisconsin.

For over forty years, AFT-Wisconsin member activists have been at the forefront of the struggle for collective bargaining rights for UW academic staff and faculty. When collective bargaining rights were extended to academic professionals in June 2009, faculty and academic staff moved full steam ahead with ongoing organizing efforts.

Unfortunately, shortly after the collective bargaining legislation was passed, UW System changed their position on academic unions from one of neutrality to one of discouragement. Almost immediately, requests for quotes for "union consultants" were distributed, resulting in the hiring of such a consultant at taxpayer expense.

Since the hiring of this outside consultant, UW System has put up roadblocks to academic unions that exercise collective bargaining, including misleading written communication, restriction of campus mail services and even prohibiting faculty and academic staff from speaking to their colleagues about collective bargaining.

It is unacceptable that such actions be taken at taxpayer expense, especially in a time of economic crisis for our state and our university system. At a time when student tuition is skyrocketing, time to matriculation is increasing and funds for research and instruction are drying up, it is a disgrace that even one penny should be wasted on anti-union campaigns.

As an academic professional within the UW System, I can attest that faculty and academic staff are the best stewards of our campus communities. As a union leader, I can assure you that the best way to empower academic professionals to best advocate for the campuses and students we serve is for us to have a voice in a collective bargaining process.

UW System should not be throwing up roadblocks to that process. I respectfully ask you to follow the examples set by California, Illinois, Montana, New York and Texas, and pass Senate Bill 523. Thank you, and I will now be happy to address any questions you may have.



Teaching Assistants' Association (TAA)
American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 3220
254 W. Gilman Street
Madison, WI 53703

I would like to begin by thanking the committee for taking the time to address this bill and for taking the time to hear from some of us greatly affected by the good public policy it represents.

My name is Peter Rickman and I am a grad and law student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As importantly, I am the president of AFT Local #3220, the Teaching Assistants' Association. The TAA is the union of grad student workers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Since 1969, we have represented grad student workers at the UW who perform work critical to the teaching, research, and outreach mission of our university. On behalf of the thousands of grad student workers in our ranks, I would like to state that we strongly urge you to pass this legislation post-haste.

I would like to start by briefly sharing with you a bit more about who we are and what we do, so that you can understand the impact that this legislation will have on thousands of grad student workers in all parts of the university.

When the state legislature had the wisdom to enact legislation in 1985 granting collective bargaining rights to grad student workers, following over a decade of grad unionism, many but not all grad student workers were included. Teaching and project assistants gained and immediately took advantage of collective bargaining rights to form a legally-recognized union. In the years since, the TAA has been the voice of grad student workers, contributing to a stronger academic community for our university and the people of Wisconsin while bargaining contracts that address the challenges we face as grad student workers.

However, research assistants were excluded from collective bargaining rights in 1985. But the TAA has always seen itself and acted as the union of all grad student workers, whether recognized by state statutes or not. Teaching, project, and research assistants have been members, activists, and leaders in our union. Even while state labor law recognized only teaching and project assistants in labor rights, excluding research assistants, our union advocated for and advanced the cause of grad student workers in collective bargaining, the democratic political arena, and through organizing.

This past year, the state legislature once again had the wisdom to take up collective bargaining rights for grad student workers and corrected the 25-year exclusion of research assistants. Now, all grad student workers will be able to form one union among all of us that can bargain a contract and take on the challenges that we face. Twenty-five hundred research assistants can join over three thousand of their brothers and sisters in the basic and fundamental right to organize collectively. From being the first grad student workers' union in the nation, we the TAA look forward to completing the long-traveled path of having one union for all of us, no exclusions.

The TAA is committed to organizing all grad student workers and formally bringing in to our union the previously-excluded research assistants, but we as a union and we as grad student workers must have the ability to take action ourselves. Opposition to and encroachment upon the exercise of the basic and fundamental right to organize collectively could stand in the way

of justice, fairness and democracy for grads but also could stand in opposition to the values that make our state and our university so special.

Wisconsin has a proud tradition as a state and in its university system of advancing core social values like justice, fairness, and democracy. As a union, the TAA has always been committed to living up to these values and being part of a vibrant, dynamic and positive university community. Were those values and that community to be threatened by anti-worker union-busting, we as a state and we as a university would sacrifice much of what makes us a paragon of sound policy and practice as an internationally-renowned and recognized institution of higher learning.

We must ensure that justice, fairness, and democracy are done in our public institutions like the university system, and anti-worker union-busting, funded by public money, which contravenes these values have no place in Wisconsin or on UW campuses. For that reason alone, this legislation would protect time-honored and important values while ensuring that workers' voices can be heard together.

As a union that takes seriously its responsibility to be a constructive member of the UW community, we are also concerned with the fiscal situation in the state and with our university. There is no place for university administration to be spending public money on anti-worker union-busting. At a time of dire fiscal straits, every dollar must be put into the mission of the university; a mission that includes teaching, research, and outreach as well as the advancement of those core social values like democracy, fairness, and justice. No public money need or should be spent contravening these values nor taken away from crucial operations in an institution of higher learning already crunched for funding.

While state GPR funding of the university has dwindled, tuition and segregated fees have risen. Positions in teaching, research, and outreach are cut while wages that create competitiveness sag even as the bureaucracy grows with more administrators. With a picture like this staring us all in the face, one can only wonder how or why public money, taxpayer and tuition dollars, can be justified for spending on anti-worker union-busting. The TAA believes that as a steward of the university community, we must call upon policy-makers to ensure that public money, taxpayer and tuition dollars, are put toward higher learning, not toward administrative maneuvering to bust democratic worker organization.

As a student, I cannot sit by idly while the prospect looms of my tuition dollars being spent to take away from the university mission and to contravene core academic and social values. We must not let tuition money be spent on anti-worker union-busting.

As a taxpayer and life-long resident of this state, I cannot sit by idly while the prospect looms of my tax dollars being spent on anti-worker union-busting in the university system when this very university system faces a fiscal crunch. We must ensure that wise fiscal policy reigns and prevent public dollars from being spent on unnecessary and unconscionable anti-worker union-busting conduct.

As a citizen and as a unionist, I believe strongly, and I am speaking on behalf of my brothers and sisters in the ranks of grad student workers, that academic values, Wisconsin values, must be paramount. Wisconsin must protect the fundamental right and core interest of grad student workers to organize collectively as we see fit without threat, intimidation, coercion, and opposition. Public money must not be spent by public institutions when we must focus upon acting in the public interest.

The public interest here is in safeguarding our core values of democracy, justice and fairness and in safeguarding public dollars from being spent in contravention of those values.

Respectfully, and with a shared purpose of taking the Wisconsin Idea into the 21st Century, we the fifty-five hundred grad student workers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the members of the TAA call upon and ask you to pass this good, sound legislation.

Thank you for hearing from us today. If there are any questions, I would be happy to answer before I head back to campus.